



Community Agency in the New South Africa: A Comparative Approach

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Summary. Using South Africa as a case study for the workings of community agency in partnerships with the public and non-profit sector, this paper focuses on community-driven developments in townships in the Western Cape. The hypothesis is put forward that although structural factors are a major influence on the success of community agency, a formal approach to project management offers a powerful tool for mitigating their impact. The paper addresses the strengths of formal project structure in the development process, and considers its limitations. Five development projects in townships in the Western Cape are examined for preliminary evidence on this hypothesis and broader implications for the nature of participative democratic process are discussed.

Introduction

Although it is still confined to isolated projects, community participation in all its forms has become an increasingly important factor in both 'developed' and 'developing' countries over the past 20 years. Its importance in urban renewal projects has gained currency over the past 10 years, as a means of empowering communities and making physical improvements more sustainable in the long run (Berry, 1993). The particular importance of participation in developing sustainable public amenities has been noted (Massam, 1993); its contribution to the sustainability and affordability of shelter upgrading has been discussed in many instances (Ramswamy and Chakravarti, 1997); and its potential importance in the delivery of public services closely analysed (Batley, 1996). A range of planning methods

has evolved to enable its implementation (Hamdi and Goether, 1997).

Importantly, participation has been associated with the development of an engaged and capable body civic. As Gaye and Diallo (1997, p. 12) observed,

the newly empowered local community, through democratic decision-making and problem solving, matures into a body capable of interacting collectively with the local authority and even with agencies from higher levels of government.

In the UK, calls for increased local participation made in the wake of the first wave of Urban Development Corporations (Oc and Tiesdell, 1991), are still being made (Lawless, 1996), and form part of a broader debate about citizen participation in service delivery

and the nature of democratic process in Britain's cities.

This approach has attracted some interest in the UK's social housing sector, as local authorities withdrew from direct provision (Lyons, 1989, 1994), and took on an enabling role, particularly since the management restructuring resulting from compulsory competitive tendering. As they adopted an increasingly decentralised structure (Lowndes and Stoker, 1992), housing authorities have involved residents in increasingly strategic local decisions, incurring good participation rates. Broader-brush Community Ownership Schemes in Scotland have also enjoyed a limited success (Clapham *et al.*, 1996).

Within the overall field of participation, community agency has a particular role. Here, communities act as initiators and managers of a project, rather than being involved, at various levels, in a process which has been mapped out by the state or other actors. Community agency has been increasingly seen as a central process in the upgrading of urban shelter in developing countries, particularly since Habitat II (Vaa, 1997), and based on a broad range of differing institutional, political and cultural settings (see, for example, Fernandes and Fernandes, 1997; Bose, 1997), as the credibility of community participation in state-driven initiatives has declined (see, for example, Macoloo, 1994; Rakodi, 1991). Community agency can be initiated in conflict with the state (Korten, 1996; Arevalo, 1997), but this need not be the case (Ramswamy and Chakravarti, 1997; Gaye and Diallo, 1997).

Some writers on community agency and participation assume, indeed find, cohesive communities. These writers focus heavily on interagency conflicts of interest in service delivery (Berry and McGreal, 1995). A small, but growing, body of opinion, however, suggests that conflict within communities may be at least as important, and that

process with quite different, and possibly conflicting, motivations and objectives (McArthur, 1995, p. 70).

Conflict can also arise between well-informed sections of the community in the development process (Grant, 1994). A growing body of opinion now suggests that intra-community conflict in the development process is interest-based, and that sub-groups form along structural lines (Clark, 1996). Although there is some debate regarding the respective roles of economics, gender and culture (Sharp, 1996), there is clear understanding that internal conflict can fundamentally jeopardise project success, while physical development projects offer a real opportunity for focusing community-building processes (Asthana, 1994).

A further body of opinion suggests that communities are 'temporal beings' and change over time. For example, when environmental issues are at stake, even where communities may be geographically constructed, "communities ... are formed around specific issues" (Dalby and Mackenzie, 1993, p. 101). Thus the allegiances within communities are not permanent and the focus of strife may shift. Over a period of time, particularly such as the life of a construction project, both issue definitions and the constitution of these *ad hoc* communities may change (Lyons and Smuts, 1998).

Despite this debate, there is not enough discussion of the causes and management of conflict between sub-groups within communities actively engaged in the process of building project development. This paper reports on a study of those aspects of project development and management which make for the successful development and implementation of community-driven projects.

The post-*apartheid* era in South Africa has seen a continued evolution of the country's democratic institutions, and the nature of South African democracy continues to develop with them. At the same time, institutions of the state in South Africa acknowledge their responsibility for the provision of basic services to historically disad-

many people remain confused about the purpose of community involvement, while others are entering the participation pro-

vantaged sections of the community in general, and to more severely marginalised groups in particular. However, they accepted at an early stage that resource and capacity limitations would mean a significant reliance on public-private partnership in service provision.

Partly in a measure to achieve economies of scale and, more importantly, as a means of uniting potentially conflicting civil interest-groups, much post-*apartheid* policy has emphasised the role of communal agency in service provision, and of participatory democracy in achieving a consensual basis for project development and management. Thus we have witnessed a growing tide of projects rooted in community agency being instigated to undertake the provision of services in the country. In South Africa today, community agency is effectively the norm in a wide range of local development projects.

Whereas social and economic marginalisation in South Africa was historically based on race, preliminary findings suggest that it is now increasingly attached to labour market opportunities and cultural constraints, with women, children and the elderly marginalised by comparison with males, *within* historically disadvantaged communities.

Findings by other researchers also suggest that, like many other disadvantaged communities, disadvantaged communities in South African cities are far from homogeneous in socioeconomic terms, in terms of migration history, or in terms of household structure (Spiegel *et al.*, forthcoming; Mazur and Qangule, 1995), even where communities are racially homogeneous. Correspondingly, political affiliations have varied widely (Swilling, 1986), and localities may often be dominated by several competing organisations (Crankshaw, 1996).

There is growing recognition in the academic community that these problems are not idiosyncratic, and that they are to be found in numerous urban communities (Crankshaw, 1996). There is also growing recognition in policy circles of the importance of the resolution of such strife if reconstruction and development are to be implemented success-

fully (McCarthy *et al.*, 1995). Despite the critical nature of these problems, and despite their acknowledged prevalence, we are not aware of any research which systematically examines the dynamics of their development. This study attempts to address the gap.

Findings in the present paper suggest that such differences can, and do, jeopardise the processes of collective action upon which hang access to funding for many basic amenities; and on which the long-term survival of services depend. We suggest that problems are deeply rooted in mistrust, and that projects are vulnerable at particular times in the development process. Furthermore, we suggest that institutionalisation of management procedures and their maintenance over a sufficient period, can do much to overcome mistrust and to enable projects to progress to completion. The broader significance of findings for the nature of the participatory democratic process is discussed.

Methods

Community-led Initiatives

Within the sphere of community-led initiatives, we have elected to focus on projects within the built environment. There are a number of reasons for this.

- It is now accepted practice in South Africa that participatory democracy is a prerequisite for investment into built environment projects.
- There is generally a large, reasonably well documented investment involved.
- The local authority is generally involved as a partner in at least one stage of the process, and often in more, as is a range of non-profit-sector organisations.
- A long gestation period is required for construction, which ensures that the participation process must go through a series of transformations and deal with a wide range of challenges—administrative, financial, legal and facilitative—in addition to the implementation of services

for which a building has been commissioned.

Within the wide range of community-led built-environment projects currently underway in South Africa, we have chosen projects which aim to address socioeconomic imbalances through provision of goods and services. Specifically, this has included extramural educational facilities, cultural or recreational facilities, or trading facilities—for example, for small businesses.

All projects selected have in common a four-way partnership involving, in addition to the community, municipal government, if only as a ground landlord; funders from both public and private sources; and consultants who acted voluntarily in the first instance.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

Our research focuses on South African projects, conceived and implemented according to principles now enshrined in the guidelines of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (see below). While we do not expect that lessons can be drawn directly from one country to another, the ongoing re-evaluation of policy which accompanied the development of the RDP (Pugh, 1994) makes it a consistent and illuminating case for study of the particular issues relating to community agency and participation. Although the policy framework for development work has changed since the introduction of GEAR in 1996, the guiding principles of the RDP are viewed as fundamental to development culture in South Africa (E.H., March 1998).

The RDP has the idea of empowerment at its core. The establishment of legal frameworks, steered by elected executive committees, ensures that devolved funds are managed for, and by, members of the community, from project inception to completion, as well as during its subsequent operation. Both the short-term ability of a project to attract funding, and its ability to function effectively in the longer term, rest

squarely on the stability and effectiveness of this management framework.

Throughout South Africa, in an attempt to address imbalances in a structured manner, the national RDP office encouraged communities to establish RDP fora. An attempt to address the problems in the Western Cape was the establishment of a Community Development Forum by the Provincial RDP office. The resources for community forum training and capacity-building did not materialise, however. The fora which survive are independent of government aid and appear to be successful at establishing shared agendas. They have been developed independently of the Provincial RDP Office through alternative funding sources. In the Western Cape, an example is the Langa Development Forum, which has proved itself to be an extremely successful development forum, facilitating and ensuring the implementation of an integrated development programme in Langa.

In order to test the idea that certain formal frameworks may be helpful in overcoming obstacles to a project's completion, we have selected the Reconstruction and Development Programme's framework (for discussion of the changing policy environment, see Lyons and Smuts, 1999). Although the RDP's national office has now closed, at a provincial and local level RDP fora are increasingly important in undertaking or facilitating the development process through community agency. Furthermore, the concepts of managing community agency enshrined in the RDP were developed at a grass-roots level in the course of the anti-*apartheid* struggle and embody a clear conceptualisation of the new South Africa's approach to this matter. Thus, we examine each project for the extent to which, throughout its process, it adhered to principles of the RDP.

The RDP is constituted around six basic principles which, linked, "form the basis of its underlying economic and political philosophy" (African National Congress, 1994, p. 1) and whose underlying objective is to carry forward development in South Africa while at the same time reinforcing

and carrying forward processes of social and political change.

The development process must:

- (1) Integrate all levels of the state together with non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.
- (2) Be 'people-driven' and be "not about the delivery of goods ... but about active involvement and growing empowerment".
- (3) Combat exclusion and divisiveness and strive for peace and security for all through fair representation, and "reflect the racial and gender composition ... and provide fairness and equality".
- (4) Link reconstruction to economic development and economic growth, and incorporate concepts of sustainability, distribution, human resource development and environmental management.
- (5) Democratise the country through active participation of the citizenry in decision-making. We argue further, that for broad-based decision-making to be practicable, responsibility must often be delegated, and accountability must be maintained between those with executive responsibility and the broader community which they represent.

Thus, in order to evaluate whether a project has 'conformed to the RDP' throughout its cycle, the extent to which it may be said to have abided by these five fundamental aspects of the programme is assessed. (We omit here a sixth condition of the programme, that projects should strive for convergence between developed and developing sections of the community through taking a strategic approach to development in South Africa's 'Third World' type communities. In fact, we conflate the notions of economic development and strategic development, resulting in five, rather than six, criteria.)

Finally, it should be noted that most South African community-led development projects employ a particular formal legal structure. In order to implement the project and in order to involve as many community members as possible in a structured manner, the community was constituted as a "Section 21"

non-profit company. Its board was an elected body, which comprised people who were seen as leaders and who enjoyed a wide base of trust in the community. Their responsibility was to act as the legal entity, develop policy and be overall responsible for the project. Under the board, and accountable to it, served a steering committee, comprising members from Langa as well as outsiders. The outsiders included the architects, as well as other, mainly white, volunteers, who were able to help with fund-raising and negotiation with outside bodies.

Ethnography

The method adopted is one of grounded theory. Interviews were carried out until a coherent picture emerged, which gave rise to the hypothesis put forward above. In the ensuing sections of the paper, case histories are summarised and analysed.

The case-study summaries presented are based on initial, informal interviews with focus groups, community activists, with key participants, or role-players in the development projects, from within the instigating communities. Consultants who acted on the communities' behalf in drawing up briefs, designing and planning developments, raising funds, establishing or seeking out capacity-building and training programmes, and following the projects through to successful maturation—or to eventual failure—were also interviewed.

The notion of a 'successfully matured' project is open to interpretation. In this paper, we take it to mean: successful completion of the physical facilities; successful management of the programmed operation of the project; and, that it serves the needs of the community.

In analysis of the projects, we examine the full 'development cycle'. This term has been adopted to cover the process of development from the point at which a need was formulated, through the establishment of formal legal structures, formulation of a programme and a brief, construction of the building, its commissioning and its subsequent operation.

The importance from our point of view of taking such a broad view of the development process lies in the fact that it allows the process of community agency to be properly identified. By taking a longer view, we are able to identify interest-groupings, conflicts of interest, forced changes of direction and so on. Thus, although we are studying projects which culminate in construction, we are looking at the enabling process by which this comes about.

In the sections which follow, we first present a succinct description of each project, followed by an analysis of the development cycle of each of our study projects. In this analysis, the five main criteria of the RDP are used as an organising framework.

The Projects: A Brief Description

1. *Ulwazi Youth Centre, Langa, 1989–97*

Objective: to provide extra-mural education for township children.

Funds: R1 000 000, to cover construction costs, fees and a year's operation.

Funders: VIVA Trust and some 50 small donors.

1989: Section 21 non-profit company formed.

1989–91: local authority delays, fund-raising and construction.

1991–94: commissioning, and successful running, but no fund-raising by manager and no pressure on manager by executive committee.

1994–97: management problems, burglary, vandalism, money problems, but still used.

1998: being extended, still management problems.

2. *Uthango Lotyebiselwano Learning Circle, Nyanga, 1976–97*

Objective: to offer extra-curricular education for township children with a focus on arts, culture and library.

Funds: R1 200 000 for fees and building costs.

Funders: National Economic Forum, Escom, D. G. Murray Trust, Argus Teach Fund

1976: library started in garage, as well as wide range of arts projects; voluntary association founded.

1989: takeover of derelict building and formation of Section 21 non-profit company; subsequent faltering operation for six months; vandalism, progressive dereliction, now largely demolished.

3. *Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Community Centre, Gugulethu, 1986–95*

Objective: to provide cultural activities and extra-mural educational curriculum for children.

Funds: R1 900 000 for fees and building costs.

Funders: National Economic Forum, Escom, Stuttafords and the British High Commission.

1986: formation of Section 21 non-profit company.

1988: split in community between members of executive committee and others.

1993: construction begins; restructuring of project.

1995: project incomplete, partial alternative uses found.

4. *Masisebensizane Educare, New Crossroads, 1994–97*

Objective: to provide larger and permanent premises for crèche which had been operating successfully from garage.

Funds: R404 000 for building costs and fees.

Funders: South African Breweries and D. G. Murray Trust.

1994: formation of a voluntary association.

- 1996: completion of facilities.
 1997: first year of successful operation, now being extended.

5. Gugulethu Central Meat Market, 1991–97

Objective: to provide shelter from the elements for meat market which had successfully operated in the open.

Funds: R1 700 000.

Funders: in grants (Escom, British High Commission, Reconstruction and Redevelopment Programme for the City of Cape Town) and loans (Development Bank of South Africa).

1991: initial attempts to formalise activities of busy local meat market by Umzamo were followed by a relapse into inactivity as other projects to foster local business gain priority with Umzamo.

1993: traders approached development consultants; formed a Section 21 non-profit company; initiated twin processes of planning and fund-raising.

1995: success with fund-raising led to the establishment of funds and building programmes; Umzamo's rekindled interest led to a struggle for control between tradesmen and Umzamo.

1997: building completed under management of tradesmen, assisted by consultants and the local authority.

1998: building commissioned under auspices of local authority and Umzamo; now operating successfully, with rents largely paid willingly and in advance.

Analysis of Case Studies and Main Findings

Returning to the line of argument presented earlier, the case studies can now be reviewed in the light of our central question: can community agency be made to work through the

use of formal project structures?

Of the projects presented here, only two have been fully implemented (the Gugulethu Central Meat Market and Masisebensizane Educare); a further two were implemented but failed after a few months or years; while the fifth has never been completed. At the same time, four of the five projects were legally established as Section 21 non-profit companies, which require standard executive and reporting structures. Project 4, Masisebensizane Educare, was structured as a Voluntary Association, for which both management and reporting structure requirements are far looser. Nevertheless, it has been an unmitigated success.

Interestingly, a deeper examination of how these formal structures were implemented in the five projects reveals the wide-ranging interpretation of formal structures, as well as some of the weaknesses in a system which allowed individual projects such a wide berth.

Below, the five fundamental criteria of the RDP are applied to a comparative analysis of the five case-study projects.

1. "Integrate ... The State ... NGOs and CBOs"

1.1. Poor relations between, particularly, local government and developing communities may thwart and delay development. Ulwazi Youth Centre was initiated during *apartheid* and, at the time of writing, has always remained independent of the local authority. Pre-*apartheid* poor relations (V.M.) gave way to suspicion between black LA and white volunteers (F.N.), resulting in delayed access to land for the youth centre and in two-year delays to final establishment of a management structure (see below, 'Democratise'). Mutual suspicion is still a barrier as the local authority finds that "the management structure is difficult to work with, there are no regular meetings and not much transparency" (U.H., B.L., November 1997).

1.2. Stable long-term relations between an active community and the external organisa-

tions involved are an asset for the long term. Short-term involvement of external agencies may often spell short-term existence for a range of programmes. Initiated some 10 years earlier, Uthango Lotyebiselwano centre was also initially independent of any state involvement (S.M.). A series of NGOs were involved on a short-term basis in promoting this community resource centre (M.N., November 1997), but no educational activities survived the departure of these organisations (Mr Thokota, February 1997), and the centre closed six months after completion, to the regret of all involved. ("We used to have a wonderful art programme for children until the centre was vandalised"—M.N., May 1998.)

1.3. Where rivalry between local groups extends to municipal elections, involvement of the state may be difficult to establish. At Masikhanye Isibane Sakho, no effective involvement of the state was ever established (Mrs Myeki, February 1997), despite protracted negotiations (F.N., November 1997), largely *because* of rivalry between competing factions (C.N., February 1998). This rivalry has led to stalemate (see below).

1.4. Strong leadership may help both internal and external agents to establish a collaboration, by communicating a clear and realistic vision, and by being able to bridge communication problems. Certainly this has been true at Masisebensizane Educare, where the proactive principal has helped to enlist all local NGOs and CBOs, as well as attracting government subsidy from several departments (A.X., F.N., November 1997).

1.5. Although involvement of the state may help to resource the construction or operation of the project, it may also destabilise political relations among participating groups. At the meat market, there was no initial state involvement (A.N., P.B., November 1997). Latterly, the state is involved in the meat market as ground landlord and in other instrumental capacities (N.M., February 1998). However, a complex history of local political

rivalry has culminated in a dynamic balance of power between the traders' CBO and Umzamo, a largely political NGO, which form the management, with the local authority wooed as a partner by both sides (A.N., N.M., February 1998).

2. "Be People-driven"

2.1. Some projects begin with widespread enthusiasm and endorsement. Initially intensely people-driven, Ulwazi Youth Centre is such a project. It involved a large number of local participants over a long period, particularly young people, in a successful planning process. The centre began with a public meeting, at the initiative of a group of concerned parents; the gangs were called together, following intense gang warfare and rivalry in Langa (V.M., November 1997; B.L., February 1998). This step was initiated by a parent who had been involved as a street-gang worker in the township. Invitations were sent by word of mouth to all people who had leadership status in the gangs or in the broader community. Notice of the meeting was also spread by word of mouth (V.M., November 1997). The architects were invited to the meeting by the parents as well, due to their history of involvement with community projects. While the meeting was initiated by parents, it was members of gangs themselves who suggested a youth centre as a project (B.L., February 1998).

2.2 The appearance of wide endorsement may be misleading. Activists claimed wide support and endorsement for Uthango Lotyebiselwano Resource Centre (M.N., Mr Thokota, November 1997), which was initiated in the wake of a youth uprising in 1976, when the separation of Bantu education led to an outcry for extra-mural educational facilities. Nevertheless, this project was always driven by a small, politically active clique, representing a minority interest (S.M., M.N., Mr Thokota, November 1997).

2.3. Initial drive and support from a broad spectrum of residents and users is not always sustained, even when it is present at the planning stages. At Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Community Centre, initial wide enthusiasm and support from street committees (C.N., Mrs Myeki, November 1997), petered out after greed among elected management (C.N., F.N., November 1997), leading also to limited access to facilities (C.N., November 1997). This is not openly admitted (Mrs Myeki, November 1997), but access is seen as being barred (C.N., November 1997).

2.4. Strong leadership may act as a strong focus to popular action. At Masisebensizane Educare, the principal and the parents' committee were the instigators and movers, galvanising excellent and continuing local participation and involvement at every stage, and establishing clear programmes for action in brief-setting, fund-raising and the involvement of support from external organisations (J.L., A.X., F.N., November 1997 and February 1998).

2.5. Finally, even when projects are driven and sustained by a broad consensus, they may find themselves the target of external organisations hoping to reap the benefit of funds and influence which accrue to the management of successful projects. The meat market is now largely people driven (P.B., February 1998), but the driving forces behind it have changed over time (N.M., A.N., February 1998) and the balance of power remains dynamic (T.S., February 1998).

3. "Combat Exclusion"

3.1. There appears to be a strong association between inclusiveness and stability. Ulwazi Youth Centre initially strove to combat gang culture by including particularly women and youth (V.M., November 1997). However, subsequent attempts by young people to exclude the parent generation helped to undermine project operation (U.H., November 1997).

3.2. Exclusiveness may undermine a project in various ways. At Uthango Lotyebiselwano community centre, women were consistently excluded (Mr Thokota, November 1997). Social pressure against their participation made them reluctant to attend general meetings as well (M.N., November 1997). It was not until 1983 that women became involved in workshops at the centre, where they were almost exclusively responsible for a wide range of income-generating activities. In turn, these contributed to economic empowerment (Mr Thokota., May 1998).

3.3. Inclusiveness at the outset of a project does not guarantee continued inclusiveness, as pressures and opportunities change. Inclusiveness may depend on a dynamic balance of power, which may change. Nor is exclusion necessarily restricted to particular social groups: it may reflect simply opportunities seized. At Masikhanye Isibane Sakho community centre, which was the product of an inclusive and democratic community initiative, shortly after start of construction, the management committee took control of funds and excluded other decision-makers from all economic and political action in the project (C.N., February 1998).

3.4. Strong leadership may contribute to the ability of a project to remain inclusive over the longer term, as in the case of Masisebensizane Educare (A.X., November 1997). Clearly, it is possible that without the principal's strong personal influence, rivalries within the communities might exercise more influence over the decision-making process there.

3.5. A drive for exclusivity may arise not only from a desire for financial gain, but where a project is seen as an opportunity for making political capital. The Gugulethu Meat Market exemplifies this trend, as Umzamo, its original initiators, have sought to wrest control of the project from the local traders' association, which brought

it to fruition (P.B., N.M., A.N., February 1998).

4. "Economic Development and Empowerment"

4.1. Economic development and empowerment may take place on two levels: either by the acquisition of skills which can be taken elsewhere, or by the acquisition of skills which will be used in the project or within the community in the initiation of new projects. Ulwazi Youth Centre was successful in the first sense, as throughout the project period, training and capacity-building were carried out at different levels for members of the board and the steering committee. Organisation development workshops were held on a regular basis. Staff were on development programmes and went on training relating to their work. The youth went to leadership and other skills training programmes. The building was planned jointly with the youth through a series of workshops. The project has also empowered many of the users: some 75 per cent of gangsters went back to school, college and universities (V.M., B.L., November 1997). In the second sense, however, the project failed. After the successful completion of the complex, there followed a period of some three years during which the project functioned extremely well under the management of a centre manager or co-ordinator, accountable to the steering committee with the assistance of white resource persons, who assisted in raising initial funding. The centre manager abdicated responsibility for fund-raising in addition to overall management of the building and its activities. By the end of three years, the project was heavily in debt, and staff resigned or simply left because of payment arrears. The centre all but closed. The key element which brought about this decline was the inability of the management and staff to manage the centre's finances. A combination of lack of capacity to manage complexity on this scale, individual greed and lack of accountability can be identified as elements in the process. In addition to econ-

omic training, this relates to a lack of will in the steering committee to manage the co-ordinator effectively (U.H., B.L., November 1997).

4.2. Economic empowerment may come from jobs or education, and does not necessarily rest on a sustained project. Initially, at Uthango Lotybiselwano, it arose in part from the arts workshops with which the project began. Once women were allowed to participate in the project (M.N., November 1997 and February 1998), they developed many short projects over a long period: a small number of people learned marketable trades—for example, brick-making; generally, the projects did not supply jobs (relying on volunteers); and skills projects petered out (Mr Thokota, November 1997). However, funds were raised which helped to send young people out to study.

4.3. Opportunities for economic empowerment are seen as a great benefit, and control over them is sometimes fought over. At Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Community Centre, the management committee of seven has been heavily empowered through control of funds, jobs and access to training. More open skills projects ran for a short period, but few people received a comparable level of training leading to employment (C.N., F.N., February 1998).

4.4. Economic empowerment may come in several forms simultaneously and can, occasionally, extend well beyond the development cycle. The Masisebensizane crèche has provided full-time employment for some 15 people, and is providing a good standard of pre-school education and care (A. X., November 1997). This not only frees mothers to participate in the labour market, but supplements a weak school system.

4.5. Economic empowerment can take place on a significant scale. The Gugulethu Central Meat Market is now able to operate throughout the year, in all weathers. It is a measure of its economic success that close to 100

traders pay rents in advance to the management committee (T.S., A.N., February 1998). It has empowered activists well beyond their economic role as traders (A.N., N.M., November 1997); and it is hoped that the market will bring tourists to Gugulethu, increasing the trading volume overall.

5. "Democratise"

5.1. The transfer from participative to representative democracy can be difficult. Democratic management of a project requires both delegation and accountability. However, despite the intensely participative nature of Ulwazi Youth Centre at its inception, a representative democratic process was never established. The election of a steering committee was a long-drawn-out and tedious process, which involved many public meetings, to which all organisations were invited. By the time a Section 21 company was fully established, poor practices had become entrenched. Because the management had been composed of interim structures, they could not be held accountable effectively during this period. Some of the stresses are still vividly remembered today: forces outside the process often attempted to undermine the process (U.H., November 1997). Racial prejudice was one factor in inhibiting the smooth agreement on a management structure (see above). Finally, key members of youth gangs never accepted the full participation of adults in the centre (U.H., November 1997).

5.2. The establishment of a legal framework is not enough to guarantee a stable democratic process. Despite the early establishment of a voluntary association (later replaced by a Section 21 non-profit company) at Uthango Lotyebiselwano arts and library centre, legal requirements were consistently flouted by the executive committee (S.M., V.M., November 1997). Against a background of suspicion between youths and parents, and between women and men, this led to the entrenchment of exclusionary practices (M.N., May 1998).

5.3. The legal accountability which exists within this process assumes a power of enforcement which communities in South African townships often lack. The executive committee of a Section 21 company enjoys access to important resources, including funds, jobs and training opportunities. Concerted action by members of the committee is difficult to thwart. Although their actions are open to examination by the board of the company, or by members of the community, it is often difficult for these bodies to exercise their rights. At Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Community Centre, elections stopped with 'take-over' by the management committee (C.N., November 1997), which appointed its members and their friends to jobs on site and to training courses (F.N., November 1997); made sure that people thus trained received bonuses (Mrs Myeki, November 1997); and thus prevented the project from reaching completion, due to lack of funds. "The management is doing its own thing. We do not know what is going on in the centre" (C.N., February 1998).

5.4. It is interesting that strong personal leadership can have a lasting influence on the implementation of the democratic process, as at Masisebensizane crèche, where consistent participatory democratic process continues. All decisions are taken by elected management committee, with consultation at public meetings, and participation of external organisations is monitored and encouraged. "The project is going well"... even after "we have elected a new crèche committee involving new parents" (A.X., November 1997).

5.5. Finally, it is noteworthy that the institutions of democratic management can be subverted as rival groups compete for dominance. In the Gugulethu Central Meat Market, a very strong democratic culture—which worked well when only traders were involved (A.N., November 1997)—gave way to a system which virtually excluded them from power (P.B., November 1997), through 'stacking' the board. It is also interesting to

note that rivalries were kept in check to some extent through the necessity to be accountable to external funding bodies. The municipality too holds some power over competing groups (T.S., February 1998), because it is instrumental in servicing the market and has guaranteed its loans. Nevertheless, relations with it are more complex and accountability more partial. Hence, the democratic process is once again more open to subversion.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

At the start of this paper, we argued that structural factors are a major contributing cause of community cohesion and, through it, a major influence on agency, endorsement and participation in development projects. Conversely, structural division within the community may be an insuperable stumbling-block to community agency in the development process. Against this background, we hypothesised that the management of the development process could act to mitigate such effects, either reinforcing existing divisions or helping to bridge gaps.

The discussion of the case studies can neither prove nor disprove this hypothesis. It is intended to 'ground' it in reality and offer a preliminary testing-ground to the main body of research, on which we are currently working. Before we turn to discussion of the extent to which our case-study projects lend support to the argument, some important qualifications need to be noted.

The case studies presented here were narrowly focused on urban districts in the Western Cape. Although the policy guidelines of the Reconstruction and Development Programme are formulated nationally, analysis of several of the case studies pointed to the importance of both local and provincial government in the development process, both as landowners and as local policy-makers. In both respects, conditions may well vary between provinces and, to some extent, within them. This study should be regarded as a pilot for a broader study, which will take account of the differing institutional structures and objectives of the nine distinct provin-

cial governments in South Africa, as well as of a range of regional economic, racial, demographic and climatic differences.

Furthermore, these studies are fairly narrowly focused in time-scale. While we are able to judge the short-term success of developments in terms of day-to-day functioning post-completion, the impact of the development process in the longer-term can only be guessed at, at this stage.

Finally, the case studies are narrowly focused in terms of development type: all were public amenities, sited within residential areas. While this enhances their comparability with each other, caution must be exercised in applying any conclusions to other spheres of development. None of these projects was as demanding for residents financially, in the long term, as, for example, water-borne sanitation or other infrastructure projects were likely to have been. At the same time, none involved as thorough-going an upheaval in personal terms, or as widespread a collaboration in project-planning terms, as would a housing project—although the Gugulethu central market came close at times!

Subject to these provisos, findings appear to lend some support to our argument that structural differences can act as 'fault lines' when the stresses and strains of negotiation are embarked upon. In each of the projects, the stumbling-blocks appeared to be rooted in structural divisions and differences in economic interests within the community. For example, in the Central Meat Market in Gugulethu, the rivalry between an established local-political faction and a local traders' organisation almost succeeded in halting the project before it could break ground. In the Ulwazi centre, differences of aspiration between longer-term settlers in formal housing and newer settlers in informal housing appear to have played a part in the later vandalising of the centre, although its construction went forward relatively smoothly. Other examples could be quoted.

However, the point at which problems and rivalries succeeded in halting, or delaying, a project were not arbitrary. An interesting finding was that there are points in the

development process at which a project is particularly vulnerable. In other words, weaknesses in a community, which may be due to a variety of reasons, are likely to manifest themselves at predictable points in the development process. In general, these arise because of major change to a situation in which an organisation is not necessarily experienced, and the implications of which have not necessarily been fully understood.

First, when funds or money became available, the mechanisms for management and accountability were severely tested. Individual jealousies, or agendas for personal enrichment were then brought into play, often for the first time in the life of the project.

A second point when projects are vulnerable is when moving into a big building. The change in the nature of management needed, the adjustment in spending patterns, the adjustment in lines of accountability: all appeared to be too much to handle in some cases.

A third point where projects are vulnerable is during construction, when a variety of problems may emerge, particularly associated with the processes of on-job training and capacity-building. Training often created new expectations *re* wages and terms of employment, while quality of work suffered from the use of unskilled labour. Capacity-building was used as a cover for nepotism or for getting friends on site. There was also stealing on site, as this could easily be organised as an 'inside job'.

Thus, there are longer-term issues which may undermine a project's progress. Local political dynamics were a strong force, often rooted in deep structural divisions within the community. The potential influence of these forces is particularly strong when the project is at such a vulnerable point in its development. In three out of the five developments, the structuring of projects according to principles enshrined in the RDP went some way to mitigating such differences. They allowed a broad cross-section of the community to have a voice at every stage of development and at all levels of management, from decision-making, through executive authority

to staffing. They provided a mechanism for defusing distrust, through regular feedback and accountability. Importantly, they allowed the operation of the project to be judged not only in terms of legality or financial performance, but also in terms of working within the 'spirit' of the programme.

Nevertheless, in themselves, the principles of the RDP were not sufficient as a means of ensuring smooth progress or successful completion. Overall, the maintenance of a commonality of interest was not always possible even within the democratic framework embraced by the RDP, especially over a long period. Indeed, in some of the projects, it was political divisions which were responsible for the development process being long drawn out. Thus, interference from competing factors, other organisations in the community, is a real risk. Although the mechanisms for consultation and direct and elected representation enshrined in the RDP allow a framework for the resolution of such problems through synergy or compromise, they by no means guarantee it. Our third finding which is of some interest is that this is where other factors appeared to play a significant role in the success of those projects which overcame their difficulties or appeared not to experience any.

In all, three main strands unite successful projects: having a clear relationship to their community context and clear lines of accountability; development of a clear brief and a well-defined management structure; and a continuous investment in the improved capacity of both staff and management. Strong leadership, coherent briefs and previous experience in running a scheme, all appeared to reinforce the potential for success of formal project structures. Where threats exist from within, accountability of the management to an external public body can also act as a safeguard against corruption or greed. Where threats exist from without, assistance from state institutions, or pressure for compromise exerted by funding bodies, may prove invaluable in stabilising the development process.

To summarise, three objectives were

identified in the introduction to this paper. Although they are at a preliminary stage, our findings suggest that experience to date holds some lessons for community-led development.

In terms of formulating policies and institutional processes and structures which are effective in supporting sustainable community initiatives, our findings suggest that, as partnerships between active communities and other bodies become increasingly widespread, an increasing emphasis on management accountability to partners from *outside* the community will have to be instituted. Both spheres and periods of accountability will need to be institutionalised and training processes established, which relate to standardised, best-practice examples. In view of the increasingly nationally driven nature of local government policy, it appears likely that in order to facilitate and encourage cooperation from local government in particular, national standards may have to be established.

In terms of additional issues which are of particular interest to inform stakeholders and role-players within the project process, findings suggest that training in project management should be established which identifies generic problem points in the life-cycle of a project and suggests methods of pre-empting or resolving them. Here, too, external accountability was shown to play a major role, since such external accountability as currently exists has the power to halt developments until consensual resolutions can be found. In terms of its long-term sustainability, our findings were that management of the service for which a building had been commissioned, and management of the building itself after completion were not sufficiently allowed for in either financial planning or, more importantly, training. The long-term viability of completed projects was heavily jeopardised by this, since intracommunity tensions, financial problems and changes of context were common even after completion.

Finally, in terms of the theoretical debate surrounding the role of participatory democ-

racy in reinforcing the democratic process, analysis of our case studies suggests that while there may be initial grounds for questioning whether community-led initiatives are viable where major structural differences lead to major conflicts of interest, there are equally valid grounds for suggesting that the community-led development process may act as a focus around which breaches may be resolved. We would argue that the democratic legitimacy of community-led development lies in a clear national policy, which institutes not only the spheres of responsibility and accountability for community groups, as for other institutions of governance, but puts forward a comprehensive policy, with democratic legitimacy, which identifies the role of community-based organisations in a national hierarchy of democratic institutions.

At the base of this paper lies the argument that lessons learned in the practical arena of participatory democracy can, and should inform both the policy process and the development of institutional structures. As the new structures of local and provincial government are held increasingly accountable, a normalisation of the participation process and its boundaries is inevitable. The successful cooperation of the two relies on a mutual accountability which will necessarily be institutionalised in time. Unless a feedback takes place, the formal and informal institutions of democracy seem likely to develop in competition with each other, fostering a climate of suspicion and resulting in wastefulness and lack of accountability.

In her spirited defence of a post-modernist approach to the analysis of urban issues in South Africa today, Susan Parnell (1996) suggests that the inter-war years in South Africa were a turning-point in urban form and racio-spatial legislation in part because they were a period of intense competition over resources. We would argue that, in the more pluralist and democratic urban scene in South Africa today, a new urban inequality is evolving, as the current climate of intense local competition for resources is inevitably making its own mark on the built environ-

ment. Communities which have succeeded in resolving conflict and in co-operating to create sustained, and sustainable, project structures have succeeded in attracting and investing aid where others have failed. In turn, the built environment of such communities shows incremental improvement and progressive expansion of available facilities, as their credibility increases both internally and externally. At the same time, communities where conflicts have not been resolved show a townscape in which stalled or vandalised developments bear witness to failed development and to the lack of new opportunities for improvement in life-chances.

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Appendix. Interviews

1. Ulwazi Youth Centre, Langa

Ulrich Hlatshwayo, new coordinator.
 Bathembu Lugulwano, new chairman of Section 21 company board.
 Victor Mosepe, initial co-ordinator.
 Fan Naude, local authority officer in charge of land in black areas.

2. Uthango Lotyebilelwano Learning Circle, Nyanga

Stix Mdidimba, chairman of Section 21 company board since its establishment.
 Mfundo Ndamane, artist involved in centre operation.
 Mr Thokota, chairman of RDP Forum, Nyanga.
 Fan Naude, local authority officer in charge of land in black areas.

3. Masikhanye Isibane Sakho Community Centre, Gugulethu

Chris Ntotoviyane, local resident and local authority councillor for neighbouring township.
 Mrs Myeki, administrator and board member of Section 21 company.
 Fan Naude, local authority officer in charge of land in black areas.

4. Masisebensizane Educare, New Crossroads

Japan Lutango, new chairman of crèche committee.
 Agnes Xalabile, head teacher.
 Fan Naude, local authority officer in charge of land in black areas.

5. Gugulethu Central Meat Market

Peter Boyse, chairman of Section 21 company board.
 Nomaxaba Mquela, Umzamo facilitator and member of Section 21 company board.
 Abigail Nyongaza, trader and member of Section 21 company board.
 Theresa Solomon, mayor of Cape Town (until October 1998).
 Edwin Hendriks, director, RDP Office, Provincial Government, Western Cape.